

Shortgrass Country
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Hombres ranching dry country are being segregated as winter progresses. News of our ill fortune has spread to all stations.

At a local bull sale last week, the dry weather stigma was in strong evidence. Neither the bull peddlers nor the traders gave the drouth victims any play. Ranchers who last year needed bodyguards to ward off the sellers were having a hard time getting a sale catalogue. Grass-sick herders were as easy to spot in the crowds as a crew cut would be at a pop festival. Feed dealers were the only ones who seemed to know we were present.

My first cut came from an old boy who ranches up in the oil rich country north and west of San Angelo. On other meetings, he's been so generous as to treat me to a cheeseburger for lunch, but this year he didn't have time for a cup of coffee. His handshake was about as warm as the buss that young nieces give their broke uncles. I've been treated a lot nicer by the folks who run those busy bus terminals.

The only fellow I could find to talk to was a compadre that had loaded up on fall lambs in time for the market to break. He was so stricken by his winter prospects that he was using a walking cane to get around the bull pens. The doctors had told him that his hind leg was lame because of a special sort of virus, but I think what was wrong could have been traced back to the \$5 a hundredweight that had been peeled off lambs he'd bought in September. Market grief, you know, can settle to any part of the body.

Not one representative of the local bank was present. The cool eyes are great hands to shift their attention to peanut festivals and car races when dry weather starts hitting the Shortgrass Country. The jugkeepers know that they don't need to hustle any business once the hillsides begin to show more rocks than anything else. Dry spells have taught them some mighty long lasting lessons. The old time bankers who stayed with us during the drouth of the 1950s still get nausea from the odor of cottonseed meal. It's doubtful if any of them are ready to start another sack emptying campaign.

My cousin, Goat Whiskers the Younger, made the sale. He didn't have to advertise that he'd had 14 inches of rain in August and September. He had one shirt pocket full of cigars and the other one decorated with a silver pen and pencil set. He said he'd had to order a siren to put on his pickup to get his old cows to come to the feed wagon. Over at our place, you could call you the whole herd blowing the low note on a short based piccolo. Whiskers has a way of presenting his good luck that can sure eat at your jealous glands.

Dry spots are scattered everywhere. Winter is going to be hard and long. Before spring comes, there's going to be a bunch of us drylanders that are going to be awfully envious of the hibernating species.